



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora  
February 25 2024  
Second Sunday in Lent  
Canon Paul Walker.

Thank you to everyone who participated in Vestry yesterday. It's so important to be together, to listen to one another and have conversations about things that matter to us: things like our goals, our vision, the resources required to get there, and... money. "Oh no, not another church meeting about money - that's why I don't go to church meetings."

Money is one of the things that Jesus talks about almost more than any other topic; and it's one of the things that we talk about - largely because how we use money is all about trust. If I hire you to do a job, I trust you to get the job done, and you trust me to pay you on time. Talking about money also raises the question of what belongs to us. It triggers the question of what is "mine".

At Vestry we also were introduced to the "church mice congregation" of St John's created by Doreen Wilson of the Knitters and Quilters. They are all on display this morning by the baptism font. You may even identify yourself in their midst. You will see a greeter, a flower guild member, an altar guild member, and a chorister. You will see Patrick, our Director of Music; Thomas, our Crucifer; Garry, our Sexton. You will see the baptism family and the wedding couple. You will even identify Fr John and the Rector.

Appropriately they are all gathered at the font because that's where our journey of faith began.

I wonder what it would be like if we had a Vestry devoted to the single agenda item of baptism. What would we need to do if we we identified 12 baptisms as a goal for the year? What would that conversation be like? How would it change our behaviour?

One of my take aways from Vestry is that it is clear that there is a great deal of commitment to this parish - to see the right thing done - to do it with credibility, trust and transparency - to work towards the financial viability of the parish. To ensure that what we have, even in these uncertain times, will be here for another generation. It's an extraordinary amount of generous commitment expended by a large number of people to see this whole enterprise continue to flourish. That's so wonderful.

If we think on those those things, then as Rowan Williams says in his book, "Being Disciples," "contemplation and action belong together" - reflecting on these things inspires us to act.

Contemplation results in a change in our behaviour. So if you have reflected on anything from Vestry I hope it inspires you to give. Give as you are able. Jesus says, give so that your right hand does not know what your left hand is doing. Some interpret this text in other words: give so fast and so generously that your left hand cannot keep up with what your right hand is giving away!

Give intentionally, with a grateful heart for all that you have received. Give cheerfully, because none of what we have is “ours.” It is all God’s anyway; so give back to God what is rightfully God’s. “All things come of thee.... and of thine own have we given thee.” We vote on a budget because we have confidence that it is possible to meet these goals. We’ve demonstrated it before and we can do it again: if you choose; and I hope you do.

Abram and Sarah set out on a journey. They left all that they knew and went to Hara. On the way, in the desert, far from home, they had a vision that they would no longer be childless. Look up to the sky and see the stars. See if you can count them. Your descendants will be more numerous than all the stars in the sky. And they laughed out loud. But this was the covenant. They thought it was unbelievable but they learned it became true.

This is the story of resurrection that we uphold and embrace. Time and time again, the one who has nothing is brought in to the banquet table; the tree that produces no fruit is given one more year; the wedding host that has no more wine is given 30 gallons of the best wine; the multitudes in the wilderness who have no food are given enough food to eat with 12 basket fulls left over; the one who is robbed, stripped, and left half dead in the ditch is saved by, of all people, the Samaritan; and the one who we thought to be a Saviour is condemned, humiliated and killed, and then

raised up on the third day to become the one who has conquered our greatest fears and anxieties.

“Be not afraid,” the angel says to Mary; and to the shepherds; and to the women at the tomb.

“Go and tell the others, he has been raised - just as he said.”

“Do you believe this?” Jesus asks Thomas.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

In every generation there will be people who come to embrace this covenant and follow it as the way of life. There will be people who lose their life in the desert and end up discovering that they have found it. There will be people who bear witness to that which seems - like it was for Abraham and Sarah, for Mary, and for Thomas - to be unbelievable and they learned that it is true.

I want to become like one of those people. We want to be changed by an encounter with this eternal covenant expressed supremely in the resurrected Christ. That is who we follow. That is why we come back. That is why we do this thing called church. That is why we take up our cross and invest in this place; because we have come to understand that we are not self made. We understand that everything in our life is from God and we are prepared to follow the way of Christ, because we have learned that this is the way to set us free. Thanks be to God.